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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (01/23): "INTERNAL DIVISION, A NATIONAL CATASTROPHE"

Main Stories:

Al Quds leads with news of intensive diplomatic efforts to stabilize the ceasefire in Gaza, while Israeli representative Gilad concluded talks in Cairo on January 22 and a Hamas delegation was expected to soon arrive for talks on the ceasefire. The paper comments that Egypt, unlike previously, now expects parties to sign ceasefire agreement documents. Al Quds front pages and Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida lead with statements by President Obama calling for the reopening of Gaza crossings to facilitate humanitarian assistance and commerce, and calling on Hamas to recognize Israel. Al Quds cites DPA in quoting a spokesperson at the US Embassy in Cairo denying on January 22 that the U.S. is conditioning assistance to Egypt on Egypt preventing arms smuggling into Gaza.

All front pages highlight President Obama's naming of George Mitchell as Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, with Al Quds calling the move a positive sign of the seriousness of the new U.S. administration. The three papers also report that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton called Palestinian Authority President Abbas on January 22 to express support for his efforts to achieve peace in the region, and to stress the need for reaching a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement as quickly as possible. In other presidential news, Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida highlight front page reports on President Obama fulfilling his promise to close, "the Guantanamo prison and prohibit violent interrogation methods." Al Hayat Al Jadida runs a front page photo of Obama signing the closure document, while Al Quds runs a lengthy article on page 2 with a picture of Obama, surrounded by his staff, signing the document.

Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida run inside reports on the January 22 meeting between U.S. Consul General Jake Wallis and PLO chief

negotiator Saeb Erekat. Erekat is quoted urging the U.S. administration to act immediately to establish a Palestinian state.

All front pages quote PLO Secretary General Yasir Abd Rabbuh announcing that the Palestinian Authority (PA) government headed by Prime Minister Fayyad, "has placed its fate into the hands of PA President Abbas," meaning that it will disband if necessary to facilitate national Palestinian dialogue on the formation of a national consensus government.

On Gaza reconstruction, Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida's front pages run statements by Palestinian Authority Premier Fayyad stating that donor countries will meet next month in Egypt to discuss reconstruction. All front pages report that Hamas will disburse \$5,180 in compensation to Gazans affected by the "Israeli war on Gaza."

Al Ayyam and Al Quds report of the reopening of smuggling tunnels across Gaza-Egypt borders, as Al Ayyam cites AFP in quoting Israeli Foreign Minister Livni stating that Israel retains the right to destroy the tunnels to prevent the rearming of Hamas. The paper also reports that Egypt discovered three tunnels and arrested a Palestinian inside one of them. In more Israel-related coverage, Al Quds' front page cites DPA in reporting that Israel has informed the EU of its consent to reopen Gaza crossings for the flow of humanitarian assistance. The paper further reports, citing Israeli daily Yedeot Aharonot, that Israel is becoming more flexible in responding to Hamas demands for a prisoner exchange deal. A spokesman for Palestinian militants is quoted calling the change, "a

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victory for resistance."

Al Quds' front page, cites AFP in reporting that UK State Minister of African Affairs Mark Malloch-Brown has demanded an international investigation into the alleged Israeli use of phosphorus bombs in Gaza. In related news, Al Ayyam's front page cites news agencies in quoting "Jewish" UN human rights rapporteur Richard Falk stating on January 22, that he believed that there were indications of Israeli war crimes having been committed in Gaza.

In lead front page photo coverage, Al Quds runs a photo of a Gaza family sheltered in a tent beside the rubble of their destroyed house, next to a photo of a Palestinian walking inside a smuggling tunnel beneath the Gaza-Egypt border. Al Hayat Al Jadida runs a photo of a young Gaza girl reading a school book atop the remains of a destroyed house. The paper also front pages a photo of President Obama signing orders to close Guantanamo Bay detention camp. Al Ayyam leads with two photos; a group of smiling children in Gaza and head shots of George Mitchell standing with President Obama.

The three papers front page reports on the injury of seven Gazans by Israeli naval fire on January 22 and the death of two people previously injured in the "war on Gaza." Al Ayyam's front page reports that Fatah sources claim that Hamas executed 17 Fatah "operatives" during the Israeli offensive on Gaza.-----
BLOCK QUOTES:

1) Al Quds editorial is titled, "Internal division ... a major national catastrophe" (01/23): "Differences, negative media campaigns and accusations of violations here and there, serve no

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internal nor external purpose for Hamas nor for Fatah. Rather, these acts entrench division and disarray... [Palestinian] national unity has become a demand, not only of the Palestinian people, but of the whole international community that is demanding reconciliation and the authority of the Palestinian Authority throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip. It has become clear that Gaza reconstruction is contingent on Palestinian national unity."

2) Mohamad Yaghy opines in Al Ayyam under the title "Gaza is victorious and in great need of peace" (01/23): "Now that the war has ended, there is a need to declare the Rafah crossing, a Palestinian-Egyptian crossing governed by Egypt and the leadership of the Palestinian people. This would pave the way for a new

agreement, which could empower Egypt to reopen the crossing under new arrangements that would end the siege and it would serve as new leverage for the PLO leadership in any upcoming dialogue with Hamas."

WALLES